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The Problem of Women in the Department: Sex and Gender Discrimination in the 1960s United States Foreign Diplomatic Service

Beatrice Loftus McKenzie

1 Alison Palmer arrived to her position as a Vice Consul at the U.S. Embassy in Leopoldville, Congo in June 1960. Less than a month later, soldiers in the newly independent nation mutinied, acting in anti-colonial rage against the former colonizers and the global forces that sought to maintain a Western-oriented power structure there. Cloaked in the authority of her nation, and convinced of her ability to make a difference, Palmer saved the lives of several young American men in the Congo. When her exploits were publicized in the international press, an accompanying photo displayed conflicting images. The photo was distinctly feminine, showing a young, pretty blonde. It was distinctly sexual, recalling pinup images of the 1940s. And it was distinctly revolutionary, showing Palmer in a beret. All three portrayals of Palmer played out disfavorably in her Foreign Service career.

2 Palmer's experiences in State Department provide an opportunity to examine the culture of the Foreign Service in a particular moment of societal change, when the access to professional success for women was aggravated by gender and race bias. In this paper I draw on Ms. Palmer's papers, oral history, State Department, and extensive court records

to examine women's status in the U.S. Foreign Service between 1955 and 1975. I argue that the sexualization of women officers in the 1960s led to less rather than more gender equality among Foreign Service officers. In the course of her career, however, Palmer's experiences in the Foreign Service defied gender norms; her battles led to greater gender equality in the Foreign Service.

3 Through the 20th century the highest corps of officers remained notoriously unrepresentative of the U.S. population. Foreign Service Officers make up an elite group of professional diplomats who serve in United States embassies and consulates abroad. Access to the service is by examination run by the service itself.[i] My previous research establishes different eras of women's participation in the U.S. Foreign Service: 1921-1939, with elite men and almost no women, 1939-1947 when women served in low level positions but did not pass the Foreign Service exam, and 1947-1975 when women began to pass the exam but faced daunting obstacles to service.[ii]

4 Senior officers in the Foreign Service employed the Foreign Service exam to prevent women -- and black men -- from serving for decades. As Michael Krenn has argued about racial integration in the Foreign Service, the greatest impediment to equality of women in the Foreign Service was the attitude of officials in the bureaucracy.[iii] The Senior Foreign Service sustained what Joan Acker has called "an organizational inequality regime", a set of interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities.[iv] From 1920 to early in the Second World War, two token women officers, Frances Willis and Constance Harvey, served "normal" careers as a political and a consular officer in the Foreign Service.[v] State Department used tokenism to suggest it was open to hiring black officers as well; very few black male officers served normal careers in the same period.[vi] Although six women passed the Foreign Service exam between 1921 and 1945, only Willis and Harvey survived the Department's draconian but unwritten policy that required women to submit their resignations when marrying. These resignations were always accepted. (A similar unwritten rule dating from the 1930s had men submit their resignations if they married foreign women; these resignations were summarily rejected.)[vii] State Department touted their achievements--Willis eventually served as an Ambassador and Harvey as a Consul General--

as evidence that gender was no bar to success in the Foreign Service. Having had two female officers serve in that period has allowed the Foreign Service to claim long experience with gender equity. The most comprehensive book on the topic, written by Homer Calkin and published by the Department of State in 1978, has allowed the history of gender equity to be told and retold, like a family history, embellishing some exploits and suppressing others.[viii]

5 The Foreign Service in the WWII and postwar eras demonstrated greater access to women than in the period 1921-1939. With millions of men called up for the military, many men and some women were recruited from the Civil Service and military to fill Foreign Service reserve, staff, and officer positions in the department and abroad; some of those employees remained in the Foreign Service after the war.[ix] Women served, but gender was a very serious impediment to their careers from 1920 to 1960. The Service still had in place the understanding that most women could not pass the exam and very few women did. It is this moment that Alison Palmer got her entry into the service. As her story shows, sexualization of women in the 1960s and the early 1970s reversed some of the gains made during the wartime and postwar period.

6 Gender made little difference in the class backgrounds of women recruits after World War II: Palmer's background was similar in many respects to the backgrounds of the men recruited by State Department of the same era. With Congress continuing its call for a more democratic service, the Department sought officers with middle class backgrounds. Though Palmer's immediate family struggled financially, they were nonetheless middle class professionals. Palmer was born in Boston to a mother whose family had owned a newspaper and a father who wrote for the *New York Times*. She worked through high school and college and studied English Literature and Political Science on scholarship at an Ivy League university, Pembroke College, the women's college in Brown University. Working at the *Christian Science Monitor* and then the *New York Times* after graduation, it was evident to Palmer that journalism as a career was not open to women and so she jumped at the chance to take the Foreign Service exam.

7 Sturdy bars existed to make the corps seem more open than ever before, but nearly every junior officer position went to white men. Some officers did enter without passing

the exam. White men, officers of color, and white women came into the Service out of the military or other government service through the "Wriston Program," a program envisioned for men but which included women; these officers filled low and mid-level consular and administrative positions with little upward movement during the remainder of their careers.[x] These lateral-entry programs enabled the Foreign Service to claim a democratic process while also allowing traditional recruits who passed the exam to follow a more direct path to the highest ranking positions.[xi] "Wristonees", mid-ranking officers hired in their 40s and 50s, filled low level jobs and left elite officers to compete among themselves for plumb political and economic officer jobs that led to the Senior Foreign Service.

8 Alison Palmer's experiences in the late 1950s demonstrate an improved, if uneven, climate for women in Foreign Service after WWII. Palmer took--and failed--the Foreign Service exam in 1955, but she was hired as a secretary in the Foreign Service Staff and sent to the Gold Coast, which became the independent nation of Ghana while she was there.[xii] As a secretary in Accra she wrote her first political report about a Ghanaian woman who had hostile comments to make upon her return from a two-month exchange visit in the U.S. She was also entrusted as a diplomatic courier, taking diplomatic mail from Accra to Lagos. She received two promotions in rapid succession and, after her two year assignment ended, she was assigned as a Staff Officer in State Department's Personnel office (PER) in Washington, D.C. Having the opportunity to see all facets of embassy jobs from first the code room and then the personnel section, she determined in Accra that she would retake the officer exam. She hoped to be a political officer because the job "was very close to being a correspondent for a newspaper." Palmer entered the service through the portal normally reserved for elite and middle class white men.[xiii] She took the Foreign Service exam again and passed in 1958, continuing to work in PER while she awaited commissioning as an officer. Palmer learned in the ensuing months that her supervisor deleted her name from the register of incoming officers in order to keep her in the secretarial assignment. Familiar with recruitment policy, she challenged and quickly rectified this injustice.[xiv] In January 1960 she joined the Foreign Service as a junior officer; she was reminded of her gender

anormitivity at the swearing in of the 28 men and 4 women in her class when the presiding official stated, “Gentlemen, I congratulate you; you are now Foreign Service Officers!”[xv] In June 1960 she headed out to her first post as consular officer in Leopoldville, Belgian Congo.

9 Palmer defied gendered expectations in her first posting as a Foreign Service Officer. Within a month of her arrival in Leopoldville (later called Kinshasa), Congolese troops mutinied against continued Belgian control over their military forces in the newly independent nation.[xvi] Violence and rioting escalated rapidly.[xvii] During a period of time known as the Congo Crisis, Belgian interests sought to keep control of the copper and cobalt-rich province of Katanga, which declared independence from the Congo on July 11. The U.S. government was deeply concerned about possible Soviet influence in the Congo. From his first public speech at the independence festivities, when Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba reminded those present that Congolese independence was won by struggle and not by Belgian largesse, the west saw him as a foe and possibly a communist.[xviii] The U.S. Ambassador perceived Lumumba as naive, “the most available and…best tool the Soviets had for achieving their own objectives in the Congo” which, due to its central location in Africa, could be used as a “beachhead” to export “[Soviet] ideas, and [affect] the course of events, not only in the Congo but in the surrounding territory as well.”[xix] Lumumba called for United Nations involvement to quell unrest in the country, but UN troops were not used in Katanga at this stage and so Lumumba requested Soviet assistance. In September Lumumba was overthrown and replaced, with U.S. approval, by the strongly-anticommunist Joseph Mobutu.[xx] Throughout this period acts of violence were perpetrated especially upon Belgian civilians, who fled the country en masse.[xxi] Palmer’s sense of duty to her job to protect American lives and interests made her refuse the American Ambassador’s edict for American women and children to leave the country.[xxii] She was afraid, but her description of her own fear holds no gendered focus, “I found myself flung into dangerous situations with no preparation, no instructions and nothing but my sense of duty to keep me going.”[xxiii]

10 Two episodes of Palmer’s experiences in the Congo brought her a measure of fame in the public eye and in the Department. En route to the airport on official business

one day, Palmer came across an embassy vehicle that, speeding along the country road toward the airport, had hit and killed a Congolese child and overturned in the ditch. A large crowd had gathered around the occupants of the vehicle, four Embassy employees, two young American men, and the embassy's middle-aged military attaché and his wife. The mob was taking vengeance for the child's death on the two younger men, who had bravely stepped away from the couple to protect the military attaché's wife. [xxiv] The men were seriously injured. One of them had been stabbed in the chest and shoulder and was bleeding profusely. The other had also been stabbed and was, when Palmer arrived, being hit repeatedly on the back of the neck with a machete. Palmer recognized the men as her colleagues. Acting in her official and protective capacity as U.S. Consul, she drove her convertible into the crowd, pulled the more injured man into her car, and drove off. She had seen another vehicle follow hers into the crowd and she hoped it picked up the second man.[xxv] Not knowing whether the man in her car would live or die, Palmer got him to medical care at the airport. She was credited with saving his life. The second man also survived the attack, but he never credited her with any act of bravery. That man was 30-year-old Frank Carlucci, who was a Foreign Service Officer then, but who later served as Deputy Director of the CIA and Secretary of Defense.[xxvi]

11 Press and private accounts of the rescue made Palmer's gender a key part of the story. One article spoke of "the day when political officer Frank Carlucci...was saved from death only by the intervention of the pretty Vice Consul, Miss Alison Palmer."[xxvii] When she left the Congo, the headline announcing her return read, "Tally, U.S. Blond in Congo, Coming Home as Heroine."[xxviii] Later an American wrote Palmer in a letter of support, "We remember so vividly your coolness and courage when you saved the lives of two of your colleagues on the road from Kinshasa out to the airport. You were magnificent."[xxix] Carlucci has never recognized Palmer's efforts that day. And technically speaking, he was not rescued by her since he got himself into the vehicle that followed Palmer's. State Department maintained gender expectations when it awarded Carlucci, not Palmer, with an individual Superior Honor award for his "constant display of outstanding courage in the face of real danger."[xxx]

12 The following day Palmer saved the lives of three journalists, two Americans and a Brit, earning their gratitude and awe as well. Palmer was en route with the Canadian Consul General, Bill Wood, to his house for a drink after work when gunfire erupted.[xxxi] They swung by the Ghanaian Consul's house where a tense standoff was playing out between the Ghanaian and UN and Congolese troops. The Ghanaian diplomat had been declared *persona non grata* for overinvolvement in Congolese politics. The Congolese government had sent military personnel to arrest and deport him. To protect him, UN troops surrounded the diplomat's house. Palmer and Wood went around the house and from across a hedge Palmer saw three of her friends, journalists trying to cover the story, sitting in a prostrate position in front of a group of Congolese soldiers who seemed ready to execute them. Again acting in her capacity as U.S. Vice Consul, and hoping to disrupt the situation, Palmer called "hi, there" to her friends, then strode into the middle of the group and stated her intent to protect the Americans. It was a very brave act. One of the journalists said later, "She was unbelievable. The soldiers were so stunned at the nerve of this girl, they just sort of faded away."[xxxii]

13 Newspaper stories that described the incidents accentuated the gendered aspects of the story, mentioning her blonde ponytail and her size – Palmer is five feet tall (1.52m). Press accounts of the "pint-sized heroine" even played into the American public's hopes for the effectiveness of U.S. Foreign Policy in newly independent African nations. One account said "this pert and bouncy blonde [is] about the most attractive and cheerful fixture of the Congo's first two chaotic years of independence."[xxxiii] But the accounts also played into ongoing Cold War anxieties about U.S. foreign policy generally and specific concerns about the masculinity of U.S. diplomats.

14 For decades State Department had referred to presumptions about women's physical fortitude and prejudice against women by other governments to justify not hiring them. In the era of the sexual revolution, it was a single woman's sexuality that prevented assignments. In the 1960s a new focus on sexuality exacerbated gender-based impediments to service which, as Palmer would experience, led to fewer opportunities for female officers.

15 Concerns over unrestrained sexuality related to Cold War fears abroad and social change at home. Congress had

accused the Service of elitism for years, but diplomats came under special scrutiny in the 1950s when Senator Joseph McCarthy, among others, charged that the institution attracted effeminate men and sexual deviants.[xxxiv] Between 1950 and 1953, 191 officers were fired for being gay or lesbian.[xxxv] A 1956 Confidential Magazine expose of Sumner Welles, drummed out of the Foreign Service during World War II allegedly for being gay, stated that "homosexuals" posed an additional security risk during times of war because they were "promiscuous to the point of consorting with strangers who might be spies" and they might be blackmailed by foreign spies if trying to hide "their perversion."[xxxvi] The Foreign Service would be at greater risk because its officers served in civilian society out on Cold War fronts. Cold War concerns over the security risks posed by gay men's sexuality continued into the Kennedy Administration and there was concern in State Department that JFK would "raze the Service."[xxxvii] The organization reacted to charges of elitism and homosexuality by becoming more "democratic" – by recruiting white middle class ex-Naval officers like Frank Carlucci, hired in 1957, but also by reducing the already small number of women it recruited. Women made up nearly ten percent of FSO's in 1960; by 1970 that number dropped in half.[xxxviii]

16 State Department records in the 1960s show a new emphasis on female officers' sexuality and the understanding that a single woman's independent sexuality exposed the U.S. to security risks. State Department kept careful records about women officers' marital and divorce status. The Foreign Service list in 1962 spelled out the marital status of 316 female officers, noting that 17 were married, 17 were divorced, and 3 were separated.[xxxix] Marital status for the 3354 male officers was not noted. Because of the other information listed, including rank and job category, it is easy to determine that a woman's marital status affected whether or not she could serve as a political or economic officer. By 1962, a few married women served as consular officers and four had been recruited by examination into the US Information Service. The three highest-ranked married female officers had entered the Service through the Wriston program, not by exam. The profile of the divorced female officers was very similar: three low-ranking officers had entered the service by exam, two for US Information Service and one as a consular officer. The highest-ranking divorced women officers had

entered through the Wriston program. None of the 11 female political officers or 18 female economic officers in 1962 was married, divorced, or separated, making clear that the Service still guarded its notion that married women could not serve in these positions.[xl] Marriage had previously spelled the end of a woman's career; given the changing mores in the 1960s and 1970s for single American women, being single but having sex was a threat to national security.

17 The Department sought special information about women officers from the psychiatric part of the medical exam. On a national level, all U.S. states permitted contraception by 1965 and the Supreme Court ruled that states could not interfere with a woman's right to choose an abortion early in pregnancy in 1973.[xli] Newly recruited women in the 1960s and 1970s who used these legal methods of birth control answered questions about their sexual history in their medical exams without understanding that the information would not be kept private. If an unmarried woman disclosed that she had had an abortion or was using birth control pills, the doctor would inform security, which understood these facts to be "indications of immoral conduct."[xlii] It became part of the woman's permanent record and affected her security clearance, causing a disproportionate number of women to fail at this part of the examination process.[xliii] An irony for single women Foreign Service Officers during the sexual revolution was that the very medical innovations that gave them the opportunity for sexual freedom turned them into security risks for a government agency long tuned in to threats by sexual deviants, but previously limited to gay men. In the era of the sexual revolution, State Department guarded the chastity of its female officers who were still required to remain single throughout their careers.

18 Alison Palmer's personnel files show that her sexuality was commented on in periodic performance reviews.[xliv] Alongside real praise for Palmer's skills as a political officer–her facility for getting along with non-Americans in Addis Ababa was "outstanding" –her superior officers commented on her figure. In a performance evaluation in 1967 the head of the political section wrote, "Miss Palmer is well-proportioned and counts primarily on nature rather than on science to portray her to the world." He added, "She is attractive and somewhat shorter than average." The comments became more personal when the officer said

Palmer “enjoys the company of men and indeed prefers it,” although he was also careful to state that she was “popular with her own sex as well,” and assured the reader that “her conduct is at all times exemplary.”[xlv] In a bureaucracy in which a woman’s sexuality could be viewed as a threat, being explicit about a woman officer’s behavior in the company of men was critical.

19 As exemplary as her behavior was, Palmer’s heroism in her posting in the Congo, so widely publicized in and out of State Department, helped mark her as what Rickie Sollinger calls a “sexual revolutionary.” The phrase is more inflammatory than Palmer’s record suggests, but as Sollinger defines it, the sexual revolution referred to white women’s sexuality. By 1965 single white women were, if sexually active and outside the control of men, sexual revolutionaries, no longer seen as vulnerable and in need of protection but seen as “aggressors against a vulnerable society.” Sollinger goes on to argue that one way to neutralize the threat of sexual revolutionaries during the sexual revolution was to “cancel out the dangers of revolution by sustaining these subjects as titillating and harmless.”[xlvi]

20 Press accounts of Palmer in the 1960s and 1970s often included a photo of her. Cropping the photo changes its focus dramatically. The full length, uncropped photograph shows Palmer in 1956 or 1957 standing next to a market stall of West African cloth in a white dress with matching pumps and purse for a Sunday afternoon outing (Figure 1). She had, in fact, attended Sunday church services in the dress and she borrowed her date’s beret for the pose. A tight crop of the photo accompanied a 1961 article about her rescue of Frank Carlucci (Figure 2). The image shows a pretty, smiling woman in what looks like a military blouse and beret. It nicely complements the Foreign Service headshot of the young, handsome Carlucci in a suit and tie. A medium-crop of the same image, however, shows that Palmer’s blouse is somewhat translucent and suggests a pinup photo from the WWII era. The beret may have emphasized Palmer as a revolutionary. Whether the newspaper accessed the photo on its own or State Department provided it, the *New York Times* used the photo more than fifteen years later when reporting that Palmer was winning gender grievance case against the State Department.[xlvii]

Figure 1

Figure 2

21

Palmer's success in the Congo and her next post in Georgetown, British Guiana demonstrated her potential as a political officer and she was rewarded by an assignment to advanced area studies in African politics, economics, and sociology at Boston University in 1965. Selection for advanced training was reserved for political or economic officers whose careers showed potential to serve at mid ranking and senior levels. No woman was selected for advanced training before 1963 and only four women were selected between 1967 and 1970 because, as a career counselor explained to Palmer, "they always resign (afterward) to get married."[xlviii] Three hundred and thirty-

eight men were assigned to advanced language and area studies in the same period. Between 1960 and 1965, Palmer had been promoted three times, a promotion rate that one State Department official noted in his testimony put her in the category of officers who were "so exceptional that they walked on water."[xlix] By being assigned to area studies training, Palmer would be changing functions, from consular to political officer. Here she would join the ranks of the most capable and ambitious officers, who would compete among themselves in assignments leading up to career ambassador.

22 A year later, however, three U.S. ambassadors in African capitals refused to hire her as a political officer, and the job she did get was truncated because she was a woman. In a plea to one ambassador, the personnel officer helping her get assigned wrote that Palmer was "an excellent officer who (was) taking a year of advanced African studies at Boston University and (has) already served in Leopoldville, Accra, and Georgetown, British Guiana." Though the ambassador might be "surprised that we would consider sending a girl to Addis," the personnel officer assured the ambassador that "given her superb record and qualifications, we believe she will fill the job splendidly."[l] The Ambassador was not pleased to take her, but he relented to her assignment under pressure and Palmer served there from 1966-68. For the first year of her assignment, Ambassador Korry required her to act as his Staff Aide for the first year of her assignment until he left the post. Palmer reported that she served as the ambassador's wife's social secretary, writing out invitations to the Ambassador's Fourth of July and Christmas parties. After Korry left the post, she had a second, highly successful year as a political officer in Addis, after which she was again promoted. With two promotions in three years Palmer was now one of the highest performing junior officers in the Service. By her own calculation however, she had missed an entire year of duty in her effort to be assigned and the year of service as Korry's Staff Assistant had harmed and stalled her career. She decided to file a gender discrimination complaint from her next posting, in Vietnam.

23 A parallel threat to white patriarchal authority during the 1960s was the challenge posed by the Civil Rights movement at home and independence movements led by nationalist leaders abroad.[li] Scholars have shown that the

Civil Rights Movement shaped and was shaped by African independence movements which threatened the colonial order in sites like the Congo. Testimony in Palmer's 1971 EEO hearing revealed that two of the ambassadors had concerns about her sexual safety based on American racialized understandings of African men. The concern was that Palmer might meet foreigners–African men–who could be "sexually dangerous."[lii] The U.S. ambassador to Uganda testified that the officer assigned to labor reporting in Kampala was "always a young, male, junior officer…The labor movement in Uganda was young, inexperienced, volatile, and all male. It would have been impossible, in my opinion, for a young woman officer to establish the effective relationships…necessary."[liii] The U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia, Ambassador Korry was quoted in the press as saying, "the savages in the Ethiopian labor movement would not be receptive to Miss Palmer, except for her natural endowments."[liv] The Washington Post quoted him to say African men were "wolves".[lv]

24 Always indignant about Palmer's case, Korry also revealed the extent to which the categories of female and black Foreign Service officers were seen as in competition with each other to displace deserving white male officers. Palmer's grievance stated that when she was assigned as a political officer in Addis Ababa, the Ambassador moved his Special Assistant to the political section and moved her into his position. In his testimony, the Ambassador said Palmer had neglected to mention that the officer in question, Jack Gloster, was "a black" and that "his promotion, only at her temporary inconvenience, achieved a break-through against discrimination of far greater import…than in her own case, imagined or real."[lvi] As Korry said in 1966, "once you begin to make distinctions as to what females can or cannot do in the Service, the fundamental principle of equality falls apart and is, unconsciously or consciously, an excuse for confirming or stirring other prejudices." Palmer faced those prejudices, too.

25 Although the ambassadors' assumptions were that a blonde, "girl-next-door" type, like Alison Palmer, would face sexual threats in the new era of black power and African independence, Palmer's own accounts suggest differently. In six years in Africa between 1957 and 1968, Palmer never faced a sexual threat from an African. She did face harassment and sexual threats, however, from Americans. An FSO who was angry at her for asking him not to use the

phone on her desk while she was working retaliated by leaving pornography on her desk.[lvii] An Ambassador later reprimanded for similar acts lifted her up off the ground to "hug" her.[lviii] Her first night in Ghana Palmer fought off advances from "a senior American Government official who was married."[lix] And she fought off explicit physical sexual advances from a married colleague in the Congo.[lx] Sometimes she was protected from unwanted advances such as the time her boss warned her not to be alone with the Foreign Service medical officer whose practice of sexually harassing single women was well-known.[lxi] Protection from the boss was not failsafe, however. Palmer's boss in Ghana arranged a date for Palmer with his friend who, Palmer learned on the date, was married.[lxii] This final example allows us to see the gap between what Palmer and her superior officer expected. She believed her friends and colleagues would see her as a woman who respected the moral and religious boundaries of marriage whereas her superior officer saw her as a single woman whose choices in the changing mores of the sexual revolution may have involved dating married men.

26 Palmer's rapid rise slowed considerably after she filed the gender discrimination complaint for this action marked her even more clearly as a gender and sex revolutionary.[lxiii] She now assumed this role in the Department and evidence suggests that her militance pushed the Department to seek change working with more "sensible, honest, legitimate" women.[lxiv] Palmer won her discrimination case in 1971 but she appealed it for a ruling that would give her a promotion retroactively and back pay.[lxv] When she won that pay, she used the $25,000 to initiate a class action lawsuit with other women officers charging the State Department with a pattern and practice of sex discrimination. The suit took thirty-four years to finally settle, although State Department resolved many of its complaints along the way. As a result of Palmer's actions, women gained in status in the Foreign Service.[lxvi] The requirement to resign upon marriage was dropped in 1971. Although Ambassadors could still manipulate assignments after 1975, no position was allowed to be closed to women officers. Women saw greater success in passing the exam, in assignments as political and economic officers, in assignments to advanced area studies and language training, and in promotions to the Senior Foreign Service.[lxvii]

27 Alison Palmer's experiences in the 1960s allow us to see how sexuality affected the structural bars women faced in the service. Palmer's gender equity complaint against the State Department exposed the hierarchy's anxieties about domestic challenges to white male authority and joined preoccupations with masculinity in the Cold War diplomatic service. A single woman's sexuality in the era of the sexual revolution became a security concern in the 1960s and early 1970s. Unknown to female Foreign Service Officer candidates, medical doctors shared information about their sexual health with security personnel, contributing to the much higher fail rate for women at the examination process. Once hired, supervisors commented on specific information about a woman officer's behavior with male counterparts and colleagues.

28 The Department as a whole and individual senior officers used arguments first about Palmer's gender and later about her sexuality in their reactions to Palmer's challenge to the gender hierarchy in the Foreign Service. Although she was one of a group of officers honored for service in the Congo, it was Frank Carlucci, not Palmer who won the individual Superior Honor Award for service there. When Palmer exceeded gender norms by obtaining a coveted assignment to advanced area studies training in 1965, individual ambassadors rejected her assignment to a political officer job in Africa on the grounds of the limitations her sexuality posed, an attitude that reflected both international and domestic concerns about black challenges to racial hierarchy. In Alison Palmer's story though, it was white male colleagues who posed a greater sexual threat than African counterparts in the 1960s Congo or Ethiopia. Particularly intriguing was the use of an image in the press to depict Palmer's successes in a State Department gender equity complaint as many as fifteen years after the photo was taken.

29 Alison Palmer is an important historical figure for several reasons. She exhibited impressive talents as a Foreign Service Officer in several societies on the verge of independence. She fought marginalization and stigmatization of gender discrimination in a powerful bureaucracy for decades and ultimately won impressive reforms for women via court settlements and judge's orders. Finally, she served as a revolutionary figure against whom other women reformers' views and actions seemed more acceptable.

NOTES

i. Other work on women in the U.S. Foreign Service includes Molly Wood, "'Commanding Beauty' and 'Gentle Charm': American Women and Gender in the Early Twentieth Century Foreign Service," *Diplomatic History* Vol. 31, No. 3 (June 2007): 505-530; Philip Nash, "'A Woman's Touch in Foreign Affairs'?: The Career of Ambassador Frances Willis, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (June 2001), 1-20; Alexandra Epstein, "International Feminism and Empire-Building between the Wars: the case of Viola Smith," in *Women's History Review*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (November 2008): 699-719.

ii. After Congress mandated the construction of a more democratic service in 1921, Department of State announced that "women [were] to be admitted to future examinations for career officers upon the same terms that are applicable to men." Calkin, 60.

iii. Michael Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (NY: ME Sharpe, 1999): 154.

iv. Joan Acker, "Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations," *Gender & Society*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (August 2006): 441-464. Although I have commented on moments when State Department's efforts to recruit women and black men as officers converge, the scope of this paper does not allow for an explicit examination of discrimination against candidates or officers of color. However, black applicants faced similar limits: there were two token black diplomats in the service until after World War II, black officers were placed in particular sites and were rarely promoted, and an assumption that they were unable to pass the exam kept most black applicants out of the service. For additional information on black Foreign Service Officers and tokenism in the postwar period see Krenn, *Black Diplomacy*.

v. Willis served as Ambassador to Switzerland, Norway and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Between 1964 and 1979, all but one assignment of women career officers were made to less important, Class III or Class IV posts with less prestige and lower salaries than Ambassadors named to Class I or Class II posts. Box 5, APP Brown. There were also two female trade commissioners in the 1920, but none by 1937; see Epstein, "Viola Smith," 715.

vi. See Krenn, 86-110.

vii. In an oral interview, Palmer said her lawyer, Bruce Terris, filed a lawsuit in 1975 to require State to change policy. It became illegal to require men to resign. Foreign wives had felt humiliated at having to do a security interview and resented not being able to maintain dual citizenship. Palmer identified three underlying facets to this rule: State Department was paranoid to think that every foreigner was a spy. State assumed that every American employee told state secrets to his or her spouse. Finally, State thought of citizenship as a baptism that wiped the soul clean.

viii. Homer Calkin, *Women in the Department of State: Their Role in American Foreign Affairs* (Washington, DC: Dept of State, 1978).

ix. Foreign Service Reserve Officers and Foreign Service Staff are different bodies of employees than Foreign Service Officers. FSR are lower level positions than officer positions and FSS are secretarial and administrative employees; women and persons of color are better-represented in these parts of the Foreign Service. Department of State sometimes uses these counts to demonstrate equal access to the Foreign Service by women and persons of color. Calkin, 120.

x. See lectures, including one entitled "What kind of man should the diplomat be?" to potential recruits in Henry M. Wriston, *Diplomacy in a Democracy*, Harper & Brothers, NY, 1956. Since the consular service was combined with the more elite diplomatic service in 1924, the Foreign Service had postings in four career areas: political and economic officers analyzed issues in these

areas in foreign postings while consular and administrative officers conducted more mundane business of citizenship, visas and administering foreign posts.

xi. Women's presence in mid-level ranks statistics in the 1960s and 1970s presents a distorted picture. Because they were recruited mid-career, when they reached midlevel rank, FS-6 or FS-5, they might already have served for 15 or 20 years. Their male Foreign Service career counterparts spent an average of 4-6 years reaching this rank. Alison Palmer's colleagues' experiences serve as an example. Nanette Chunk entered the Foreign Service Staff in 1949 as FSS-13, rose to FSS-8, converted to a Foreign Service Officer at FSO-6 in 1959. Wilma Mayo entered FSS in 1951 as an FSS-13, rose to FSS-10 and converted to FSO-7 in 1959. By the time they started their careers as low ranking (FSO-7) or low to mid ranking (FSO-6) consular officers, they were already seven to ten years into their careers. "Second Affadavit of Alison Palmer," January 19, 1982, in *Palmer v. Muskie*. For additional information on how FSOs viewed Wristonees, see Charles Thayer, *Diplomat* (NY:Harper & Brothers, 1959): 272-274.

xii. A personnel officer testified in 1971 that Palmer would have been unable to pass the Foreign Service exam in 1955 because the Service made a practice of allowing either one woman or one black candidate each year to pass, and a black male officer passed in 1955.

xiii. Through the 20th century, women failed the FS exam at a much higher rate than men. All women failed the exam between 1929 and 1945, but in the 1960s and 1970s they continued to face a higher barrier to entry than their male counterparts. In 1971, 12 percent of women and 16 percent of men passed the exam. In 1974, 10 percent of women and 17 percent of men passed.

xiv. Folder 4, Alison Palmer testimony, June 14, 1971, APP Brown.

xv. AP draft autobiography, 38. In 1960 State Department had had female FSOs for 38 years.

xvi. The mutiny started July 9, 1960. For Ambassador's quote, see Higgins, p. 247. See also "US Policy Regarding the Congo Crisis: Support of the UN Intervention; Concern With the Possibility of Soviet Intervention; Concern with the Political Situation; Policy Regarding Katanga," United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Africa (1958-60)*: 251-644.

xvii. Oral history interview of Owen Roberts, ADST, http://adst.org/2014/06/losing-the-congolese-bet-the-belgian-congos-violent-road-to-independence/.

xviii. *The Guardian*, 7/1/60. See also oral history interview of Alan Lukens, Consul in Congo - Brazzaville, ADST, http://adst.org/2014/06/losing-the-congolese-bet-the-belgian-congos-violent-road-to-independence/.

xix. Higgins, 247.

xx. Lumumba was sent to Katanga where he was tortured and killed in January 1961. United Nations forces landed in Katanga in December 1962 and the secession ended in 1963.

xxi. One source said 80 percent of 180,000 Europeans left the Congo within two weeks of the mutiny. Lisagor, Peter and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime in Heaven: Adventures in the Foreign Service* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964): 245.

xxii. Oral History Interview with Alison Palmer conducted by author, May 6-8, 2013 (hereafter oral interview). Ambassador Clare Timberlake was in his first ambassadorship and had been in country for only eight days when this violence broke out. Lisagor, Peter and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime in Heaven: Adventures in the Foreign Service* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964): 245.

xxiii. Palmer draft autobiography, ch. 2, 2. Many years later she noted that a male colleague who refused an assignment to Stanleyville, in Katanga Province, out of concern for his personal safety was not reprimanded for it but a woman who refused an assignment to Mogadishu, Somalia for the same reason was forced to resign.AP draft autobiography, 12.

xxiv. Higgins, 254.

xxv. Higgins described a bus that entered the mob, stopping by Carlucci, who backed into it before it drove off. Higgins, 70.

xxvi. Frank Carlucci was Deputy Director of the CIA under Jimmy Carter from 1978-1981; Secretary of Defense in the second Reagan Administration. Carlucci had served in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War.

xxvii. Waldemar Nielsen, "Our Envoy Searches for Peace in the Congo, *New York Times*, April 15, 1962.

xxviii. Newspaper clipping dated July 11, 1962, in "Scrapbook: Palmer v. Church + State, vol 1 1955-76," Series 6: Autobiography and Writings, 1931-2002, Alison Palmer Papers, Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University (hereafter APP Union).

xxix. Letter from Harry D. Brown, World Mission Campaign, American Baptist Convention to AP, October 1, 1971, Box 8, Series 4, APP Union.

xxx. "State Department Publicity Bulletin 1962," in Folder 19, APP Union. See also Higgins, 252.

xxxi. Doris Herzig, "A'ville Girl Home From Congo, Is Ready for More Adventure," *Newsday*, July 12, 1962. In APP Union.

xxxii. "Scrapbook: Palmer v. Church + State, vol 1 1955-76." In APP Union.

xxxiii. "Girl is Praised for Bravery in African Post," undated clipping marked in pencil: July 1962. In APP Union.

xxxiv. K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2005: 63.

xxxv. "McCarthyism and Cold War: Diplomatic Security in the 1950s," 129. http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/176702.pdf

xxxvi. Confidential Magazine expose of Sumner Welles, March 1956. See also Cuordileone.

xxxvii. About FSO concerns that JFK viewed FSOs with skepticism because, as he mentioned in a speech to FSOs who were being promoted in 1961, JFK had been reported to want to raze the State Department. He said in that speech, "In spite of what you read, we love the State Department." Lisagor, Peter and Marguerite Higgins, *Overtime in Heaven: Adventures in the Foreign Service* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 2-5.

xxxviii. Calkin shows 9.8 percent in 1960 (336) down to 4.8 in 1970 (147), a 56 percent decline. Calkin 127. June 1, 1965, 7 percent of all FSOs were women. June 1970 dropped to 4.8%. By June 1975 they had barely surpassed the 1965 level at 8.8%. "FS Investigation on Status of Women," 1971, APP Union, 2. See also "Summary of Employment," July 25, 1975. In Box 2, Alison Palmer Papers, Brown University (hereafter APP Brown). Carlucci, age 30 in 1960, was from rough, coal-mining district near Wilkesbarre, PA. A graduate of Princeton, he had done some graduate work at Harvard before entering the U.S. Navy as a lieutenant during WWII. Higgins, 252.

xxxix. Divorced women faced discrimination in hiring. A divorcee with a child was turned away by a recruiter in the early 1970s because she had a dependent. In an undated State Department report, circa 1975, Box 10, folder 2, APP Brown.

xl. In 1962 the 11 women political officers made up 1.6 percent of the 670 political officers; 18 women economic officers were 3.5 percent of the total 511. *Personnel for the New Diplomacy: Report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Personnel*, Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (December 1962), 151. Women in the 1975 made up 44 percent of the college population. They took the exam at much higher rates than may be expected. In 1975 30 percent of the applicants were women. Box 2, APP Brown.

xli. See Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women,* New York: Ballantine, 2002, 234-241.

xlii. "Performance Ratings Reports," Series 3, Box 5, APP Union.

xliii. "FSO Investigation on Status of Women," Box 10, APP Union. See also Box 2, APP Brown. The issue of psychological health came up again during Alison Palmer's case. While the case was being heard, Undersecretary of State Macomber told Senator Clifford Case, R-NJ, that Alison was "not well". The standard understanding for a comment like this was lack of psychological health. Palmer felt compelled to introduce "very extensive" information in the case about her physical and psychological test results and to disclose to Case's staff that her limited medical clearance

was related to skin cancer. "Whatever anyone may think... it at least indicates that I'm in sound shape mentally and physically. You can feel free to pass this to any Senator or staff member concerned with the Mace hearings." Letter from AP to John, staff aide to Senator Case, former FSO, September 1971, in "FSO Litigation Correspondence, 1968-70, Series 4, Box 8, APP Union.

xliv. Molly Wood's work shows that the physical beauty and personalities of FSO wives were commented on in male officers' reviews. See Wood, "Commanding Beauty," *Diplomatic History*.

xlv. EER in Addis. When rating her, a mentor ranked Palmer favorably regarding her femininity, stability, character, personal habits, associates, and loyalty to the U.S.

xlvi. Sollinger, 230.

xlvii. Benjamin Welles, "Woman Winning Her Case Against State Department," *New York Times*, February 28, 1972. The photo had been taken during Palmer's tour as a secretary in Ghana between 1956 and 1958. It is not certain whether the *New York Times* chose to use the photo on its own or whether the State Department provided it, but this photo was never used by the press in the same era that accompanied Palmer's successful struggle to be one of the first women ordained in the Episcopal Church.

xlviii. Series 5, APP Brown University. See also Calkin, 138. Calkin shows the percentage of women officers who left the service as junior officers (51.8 percent) was double that of men (24.1 percent) but it is unclear that all left to get married. Calkin, 128.

xlix. "Statement of Findings, Analysis and Recommended Decision in Appeal of Miss Alison Palmer" August 18, 1971, Folder 22, MC 390 Alison Palmer Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University (hereafter APP Schlesinger).

l. Edward Dobbins to Ambassador Edward Korry, in "Findings," APP Schlesinger.

li. Cuordileone, *Manhood*, 51. The Civil Rights Movement was shaped by and shaped African independence movements, threatening the colonial order in sites like the Congo. One fight of the violent reaction to the Black Power movement domestically was the safety of white women. As Rickie Sollinger put it, "the white public's fears about social instability, economic insecurity, gender insubordination, and black challenges to race hierarchy int he United States. (221)

lii. Edith Kermit Roosevelt, "New Crisis in Foggy Bottom," July 20, 1971, in "EEO Hearings, Summer 1971," Series 4, Box 6, APP Union.

liii. "Reply to Interrogatory by Olcott Deming," August 6, 1971, Series 4, Box 6, APP Union.

liv. Letter from Edward Korry to Edward Dobyns, February 11, 1966, *Ibid*. See also letter from Alison Palmer to Richard Petree, Counselor for Political Affairs in Ethiopia, August 27, 1971, quoting newspaper coverage of the sex discrimination case, asked him to assure her friends in Addis that she had testified that there was no basis for Ambassador Korry's statements, Series 4, Box 6, APP Union.

lv. Letter from Mrs. Chris (Eugene) Rosenfeld to Alison Palmer, October 12, 1971 cites Washington Post article. Letter from Margaret J. Anstee, UNDP Resident Representative in Rabat to Alison Palmer, undated. Had written letter to *Herald Tribune*, notes she was moved to write more by "patronizing judgments on Ethiopia and Ethiopians" in the press than by "passionate support of feminine rights." In "FSO Litigation Correspondence, 1968-70," Series 4, Box 8, APP Union.

lvi. Foreign Service Reserve Officer Richard Gloster had been hired as a budget analyst, had no training or experience in African Affairs, and had been sent to Addis as Staff Assistant to Ambassador Korry. This was his first overseas assignment. For information about assigning black officers to Africa in the 1960s, see Krenn, *Black Diplomacy*, 134. Krenn states that State Department was under pressure not to assign black officers in Africa because it would be equated to assigning Jewish officers to Israel which, critics charged, led to a separate foreign policy.

lvii. This incident happened in 1978 or 1979. The predecessor in her job, this male colleague was due to be shipped out to his next post. He should have asked to pick up his messages in the Foreign Service Lounge, but instead he came to her office to get his messages and make phone

calls, standing right next to her and interrupting her work. After several requests to disconnect his voicemail and use the FS lounge, which he disregarded, Palmer disconnected the voicemail. That afternoon someone left a typed pornographic narrative on her desk. Palmer believes it was her predecessor because the secretary said no one had come by her desk and there was a coded back entrance was used only by officers with the combination. Palmer took the porn to her boss, who did nothing. Alison Palmer oral interview by author.

lviii. Palmer told of an ambassador who was known for sexual harassment. In his home at official functions and in the office he used to kiss women and snap their brastraps. He made no distinction between subordinate officers' wives, secretaries, and female FSOs. When his post was inspected, some brave women spoke up about his practices and he was told to stop. A year later, when Palmer met him in the hall at State Department, the ambassador picked her up off her feet to give her a hug. Palmer considered this action harassment. AP oral interview with author.

lix. Folder 4, testimony, June 14, 1971, APP Brown.

lx. Palmer described the incident in which she had attended a function with her colleague and his wife. His wife asked to be dropped off at home first because she had a new babysitter. The colleague dropped Alison off next, grabbing her at the door and flinging her on her bed. She was not concerned she would be raped but instead shouted, "What the hell are you doing?" He was mortified and left immediately. The next day he brought candy and flowers to her in her office and apologized. AP oral interview with author.

lxi. AP oral interview with author.

lxii. She felt he would not have offered up his daughter or sister to a man in that way. AP oral interview with author.

lxiii. Letter from Department, November 26, 1969, in "FSO Litigation Correspondence, 1968-70," Series 4, Box 8, APP Union. See also Box 5, APP Brown.

lxiv. Under Secretary of State Macomber stated his preference for working with Women's Action Organization rather than unnamed "crazy bra-burning" women. Calkin, 157. Palmer dismissed Women's Action Organization as "management-oriented." Calkin, 150.

lxv. *Palmer v. Rogers* CA 2324-71 appealed to District Court May 1972. Palmer prevailed and won retroactive promotion with back pay and attorney's fees and costs: $6,000 back pay and $26,000 fees. Box 5, APP Brown.

lxvi. Two organizations in the Department pushed for change, Women's Program Committee, organized by State Department, and Women's Action Organization, organized by women in the three Foreign Affairs agencies. These two organizations might be fruitfully compared to two unions, one organized by a corporation and aligned with corporate needs and the other organized outside and aligned with the workers' needs. Alison joined the latter group, but she operated outside of even that group, and certainly outside the group set up by management.

lxvii. A review of actions as a result of the class action lawsuit includes that State Department settled hiring claims in 1983 and 1985; it settled charges of discrimination out of cone assignments and in relief in 1987; State recognized disproportionately low number if eligible women won the Superior Honor Award in March 1987; Court finds State Department out of compliance in exams process in 1985, 1986, and 1987 and compels State Department to cancel the exam in 1989; State Department settled promotions and gave back pay of over $1 million to women in November 1994; State Department agreed there was sex discrimination in 1991-94 and offers 390 class members the opportunity to retake the oral assessment resulting in the appointment of 11 women.

ABSTRACTS

Alison Palmer, a United States Foreign Service Officer from 1959 to 1981, brought a gender equity complaint against the U.S. State Department in the late 1960s and then led a class action lawsuit by female officers that lasted until 2010. Examining the records of Palmer's grievances against the Department of State reveals linkages between gender, sex, and race in the U.S. Foreign Service. U.S. Ambassadors to three African nations justified their rejection of her from their staffs by stating that Palmer would be an ineffective diplomat because she would face sexual advances by her counterparts in the African governments. Yet, as Palmer testified in 1971, the only threats of sexual assault she faced in African postings were by more senior personnel in the American diplomatic community. The actions against Palmer show how sex replaced gender as the excuse for discrimination against female officers in the late 1960s and 1970s Foreign Service. The sexualization of women officers led to less rather than more gender equality among Foreign Service Officers.

INDEX

Keywords: Alison Palmer, class action lawsuit, Foreign Service exam, Foreign Service Officer, Gender, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual revolution, sexuality, State Department, U.S. Foreign Service, Wriston program
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